

# MAFO

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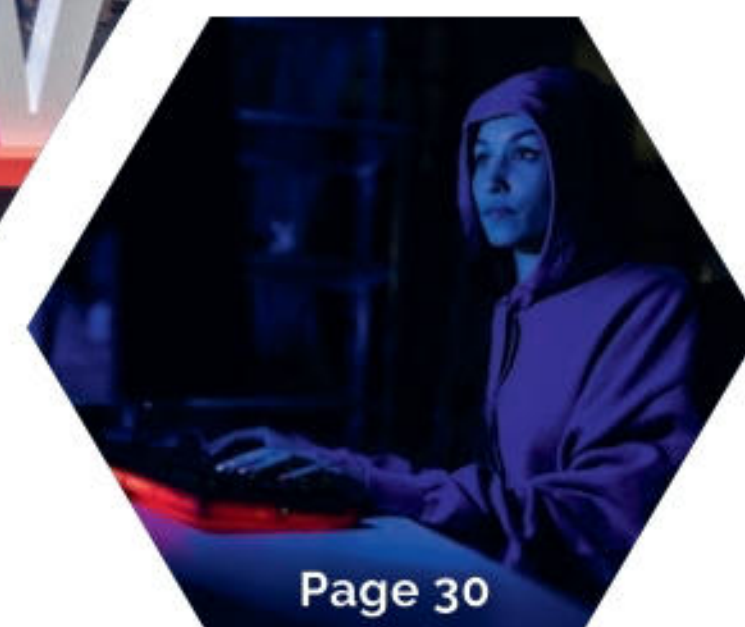
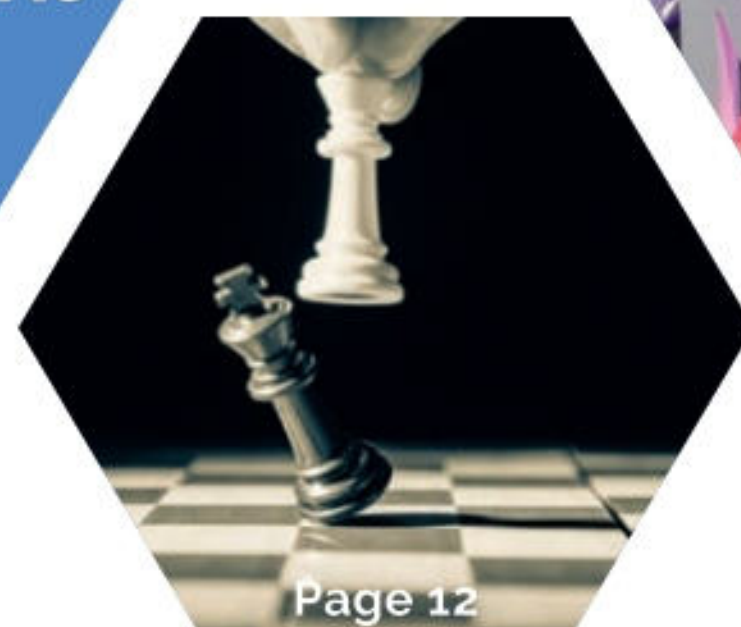
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Special Topic

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# Networking in perfection

If only there wasn't this paralyzing fear of rejection!

The biggest stressor when approaching strangers is the fear of rejection. The thought "What do others think?" is so ingrained in many people that they do not dare to approach others. But without this step, networking is not possible. That is a shame, because you are missing out on many opportunities in life. If you do want to give it a try, read here what you should never think, but what you should do instead.

*By Oliver Schumacher*

**W**ho has not been there? You are at an event, whether for business or pleasure, and you only talk to people you have met before. Yet events like this are wonderful opportunities to get to know new people. But all too often people are too shy. You do not want to come across as pushy. After all, it could lead to an awkward silence or the person you are talking to could be unpleasant in some way.

For many people, it is therefore easier and more relaxed to only talk to people they know anyway. At least then you know where you stand. But if you do not talk to strangers at events, you run the risk of living

below your means. Whether it is missing out on interesting topics and opinions, or perhaps even jobs and friends.

## The fear of rejection

Admittedly, hardly anyone admits this to the outside world, because what would your friends or colleagues think if you said "I don't want to go to the event. I don't know anyone there. And I don't want to talk to anyone. I'm just worried that I'll be a nuisance if I sit or stand next to strangers?" More socially acceptable are arguments, or rather excuses, such as "I can't go to the event, unfortunately I don't have time!"



“ But if you do not talk to strangers at events, you run the risk of living below your means.

From a purely objective point of view, you could say: “Why don't you just go? If you approach a few people, you're bound to have a few conversations. And if someone actually turns you down, then just go and talk to other people at the event.” That is the logic. And because it sounds so plausible, most people who would like to network but do not know how to do so stress themselves out.

Suddenly, agonizing thoughts pop into their heads, which are often very (self-)destructive: “Why on earth am I too stupid to just say to someone ‘Hello, what brings you here to the event?’ or ‘Hello, I'm Max Mustermann. You and I don't know each other yet. How did you hear about the event?’”

### False expectations are deceptive

If you expect or demand of yourself that you have to meet interesting people, you are bound to fail. Because then you think and judge far too much: “What does he look like? I'm not going to see him!”, “They drink beer that early? They can't be sensible people!” or “Oh, he's standing there on his own, so he can't be important!”. These judgments are fatal – and nip any idea of networking in the bud.

Networking is not primarily about only approaching certain people, but generally people you do not yet know – without prejudice. After all, you are not supposed to spend the whole evening (or the rest of your life) with the person you have just spoken to, but you should definitely change conversation partners.

And yes, sometimes there is just no spark – but other times it is instant. But that is normal. However, if you are frantically looking for clients or a new partner by networking and talking to people, you are putting yourself under far too much pressure. I am sure you have also experienced this: people who want to sell you something right away at an event appear very desperate to others – and therefore unattractive.

### How to strike up a conversation ...

A fairly relaxed option is to take a quick look around the event room and then introduce yourself at a bar table where there is still some space, for example, with the words “Hello, I'm Max Mustermann. May I join you?”. The other people at the table are usually in the middle of a conversation but are happy to let you into their circle. It is not about entertaining the whole table straight away, but about listening first. What is the conversation about? Can you contribute something?

Ideally, you should not attract attention by giving a long monologue or even a lecture. However, this can quickly happen if you expect to inspire those present: “What could the others think if they do not realize what a brilliant person has just joined them?”

It is better to ask a good question about the topic that has just been discussed in order to show interest and ideally expand your own knowledge spectrum.

This is exactly what is crucial: asking questions to understand other people even better. Do not hold unsolicited monologues. Sympathy quickly develops when you realize that another person is genuinely interested in your experiences and opinions.





If you cannot do anything with the topic at the table at the moment, it is better not to ask or say anything about it yourself but perhaps join in a few minutes later when the topic is more suitable or interesting for you. Or, when something is finished, introduce another topic, for example “And what did you particularly like about the presentation by the guest speaker on stage that we heard earlier in the room?”

### And when will the business come?

“So, what do you do?” is a very common question on first contact. Here, however, it is important to maintain a balance between pushiness and indifference. If one person is too much in sales mode while the other is not in buying mode at all, it can quickly become awkward.

Switching to a more in-depth business topic afterwards has proven to be a good idea. For example, you could add the person via LinkedIn and call them a few days after making contact to say “Nice that we spoke recently at the event in Paris. I have now seen that you do A and B. I thought I would pick up the phone for a moment because I have a valuable addition. Can we talk briefly about this?”

### Networking in perfection

If you want to network properly, you do not just talk to strangers in order to sell them something, but to help them unconditionally – without any ulterior motives. In short: you support the person by giving them contacts, tips or recommendations if you have the impression that these suggestions would be of benefit to them.

This strengthens your own reputation in the medium term, even if not every person you have helped will – and can – return the favor directly. The bottom line, however, is that it makes you an even more attractive person to talk to and contact, because word is increasingly getting around that you are a person who sees solutions and ways forward, has many contacts and supports others without prejudice and without expecting anything in return. ♦



Oliver Schumacher

Oliver Schumacher, sales trainer since 2009, networking professional and personal brand, sets new accents in the areas of knowledge transfer, learning culture and personal positioning in a likeable, well-founded manner. Under the motto “Be real”, he shows how anyone can become No. 1 - whether self-employed, manager or employee. For him, the main drivers of growth are curiosity and courage, discipline and (self-)confidence. [www.oliver-schumacher.de](http://www.oliver-schumacher.de)